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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: current challenges and forward-looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls

Statement submitted by the Legion of Good Will, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Statement

Regarding the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women on "current and forward-looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls", the Legion of Good Will (LGW), a Brazilian NGO in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, collects and shares best practices and lessons learned within the United Nations system on strategies of empowerment and advancement of women and girls to disseminate at national and international levels through the LGW's Community centres, day-care centres and schools in Latin America, Europe and in the United States, especially in Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia, Argentina. As the journalist, radio broadcaster and writer José de Paiva Netto, President of the Legion of Good Will states: "All successful organizations utilize the remarkable presence of spiritualized and enlightened women. Intuition, the competence of the Creator that lies over all creatures, is one of the powerful female instruments. Maybe that's why Voltaire (1694-1778) once had said: 'Tous les raisonnements des hommes ne valent pas un sentiment d'une femme', which means, all men's reasonings are not worth the sentiment of one woman."

Since the beginning of life in society, women were considered to be inferior to men. In the last century, around the 1930s women had no right to vote and very seldom could they drive a car. The Legion of Good Will defends just, political, cultural, scientific, philosophical gender-equality strategies. As stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his/her country. The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status are essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life.

As much as women today can lead big corporations, pilot international aircraft, perform operations in hospital surgery centres, take over the labour market, finish college and approach the same rights as men, there still is a long way to go. It is unacceptable that in the twenty-first century, women have still suffered with the results of a millennial culture that makes them subjugated to men. The Legion of Good Will brings to the 49th Commission on the Status of Women its cooperation for the absolute fulfilment of the Beijing Platform of Action, working to facilitate partnership between men and women in all sectors, whether political, cultural, scientific or educational. As the President of the Legion of Good Will addresses gender issues, it is frequently noted that his vision about the topic is the saying "To value the Woman means to dignify the Man". LGW accordingly reinforces the important role of women in the social arena. It believes that a woman has the right to become president of a country, a religious leader, a CEO, a captain of aircraft and transatlantic ships; she has the right to become a doctor, an engineer, a teacher, and thus she can actively act in all ranks of society. At work, there is a fair concept of value among men and women: that of competence (see Paiva Netto, *Reflections and Thoughts*, 1987).

As a result of the numerous financial and psychological problems experienced by women as they seek to bring a healthy pregnancy to term and decently raise their children, the LGW has created several programmes to minimize this emergent situation in its Community and Educational Centers, among them the programme Woman BEING and Baby-Citizen. This programme develops several integrated

actions for all family members, independent of their ages. The main objective of the programme is to rescue human and professional self-esteem, intellectually and emotionally. A team of professional volunteers conducts activities to improve the quality of life of those people as a whole, combining ethics and spirituality with material values, aiming at the true exercise of citizenship.

One of the LGW's activities in partnership with the private sector, government departments and volunteer support in order to effectively generate results is to enrich the quality of life of the most underprivileged women in society through educational conferences, beauty classes, workshops and occupational courses to improve family financial resources, orientation in the area of health to facilitate information on outpatient hospital admittance procedures, juridical and psychological help. Emphasis is given to the project Baby-Citizen to strengthen the relationship between mother and child, to encourage full prenatal care, to rescue the meaning of pregnancy and combat child and mother malnutrition.

Women start attending the programme's practices after their third month of pregnancy. During all pregnancy stages they are helped to prepare the unborn's trousseau and undergo clinical exams; they receive complimentary food items, as well as speech therapy, nursing assistance and music therapy assistance for themselves and their families. Women attend workshops about caring for the unborn, alternate foods, breastfeeding, family planning, sexually transmitted diseases, breast and cervical cancer etc. The same importance is given to the motivation of praying together as a family.

The practices continue until the baby turns one year of age. During this year, mothers come in groups to the workshops. They are advised about infant malnutrition, nutrition, day-care centres, sanitation and baby oral health. Another activity to guarantee women's rights are the Legion of Good Will's day-care centres and schools that prepare children to achieve their full potential as citizens. Thousands of children are annually taken from social risk situations and are prepared so that they can face labour market competition. Schools are composed of modern research centres, physics, chemistry, biology and computer laboratories, three gymnasiums and a big recreation area.

In this context, the day-care centres have a preponderant role because the Legion involves children from their earliest years in a learning process with a solid basis. These children will turn out to be adults prepared for life, complete human beings, with brains and hearts connected. The Ecumenical Citizen Pedagogy is the differential issue of these educational complexes. It introduces the universal values of Spirituality, an accurate taste for Solidarity practices in students' characters. It enables individuals to contribute to the non-stop improvement of the social environment. The motto that leads activities of the LGW's educational centres is summarized as: "Here we study to form mind and heart".

To support women and girls who stand at social risk, since the 1980s the Legion has made schools and Educational Community Centers available throughout Brazil and abroad. In those centres, the LGW offers free-of-charge early education, elementary, junior high school education, occupational courses to thousands of children and youth. As an example, we have the "LGW Educational, Cultural and Community Center" in the city of Rio de Janeiro, the "José de Paiva Netto Institute" in São Paulo, "Alziro Zarur Home and Park" in Glorinha, Rio Grande do Sul, and many other modern occupational school centres in Brazil. The Ecumenical Citizen

Pedagogy is applied to LGW's educational centres. It conciliates intellect and feeling under the light of ecumenical spirituality. It contributes to solutions for the greatest human conflicts and guarantees, according to the thematic issues, women's and girl's equal participation in gender equality.

As the President of the Legion, journalist Paiva Netto states:

"Discord, radicalism, hostilities of all kinds must be kept away from the religious, philosophical, political, scientific, economic, artistic and sport debates and proposals, among others, for Man or Woman is born on Earth to live in society.

"Conciliating is, therefore, our great calling since we are based on the wide Ecumenical experience of the Legion of Good Will (LGW). Brazil and the world need to immediately live an Unrestricted Ecumenism, based on the deepest values of the Spirit. Great is the nation and wise is the ruler that reconciles the values of the components of both genres, of every race, belief, political conviction. They are the builders of true progress.

"The Legion of Good Will has assumed serious social commitments since its honoured and greatly missed founder, Alziro Zarur (1914-1979), under divine inspiration, spread the roots of this Organization in Brazilian soil. LGW struggles to build a society where all Human Beings are really equal in their rights, and whose social foundation, no matter how admirable and recognized it is, does not become a source of prejudice against citizens' rights and freedoms — a society in which only God and His Laws of Love and Justice can inspire responsibilities for individual freedom as well as ensure freedom for all.

"I speak about the Supreme Creator who is love, not about those who wish to make Him an odious tool of fanaticism, prejudice and hatred. Thus, the real virtue will be the one built upon people themselves, in the honest occupation of their days, in the administration of their goods, in their respect towards others, in the beautiful and instigating adventure of life. A nation composed by people like these will always be great and inviolable.

"This is a time of union of everybody who believes in the regeneration of the social body, having the Spirit of the Human Being as its principle. And what do we see around the Planet other than the establishment of injustice? Who is guilty? The street gangs? The greedy or the corrupters? The explorer or the rebellious people? No! The guilty are those who consider themselves good, honest, capable, in other words, the ones who are accommodated and satisfy themselves on claiming human rights for their own benefit, therefore forgetting to more audaciously and promptly fulfil their social, moral and spiritual duties. When the territory is not defended by the good, the bad make 'just' the victory of injustice."

In order to ensure forward-looking strategies for the Beijing Platform of Action for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls, Governments and Civil Society should maximize strategies to rescue the quality of public and family education, all based upon the adoption of ecumenical and spiritual values.